**Note: The explanatory text in this paper template is provided to help you understand the different parts of an APA paper. After reading the information, please delete it, and use the paper as a template for your own papers. In the various areas of the paper, such as the titles, you may wish to edit the text with your own information for your paper instead of deleting it, in order to keep the correct format. Save this template in a file for future use and information.**

Page 1 begins on the cover page. The entire document should be double-spaced, have 1-inch margins on all sides, and use 12-point, Times New Roman font.

Full Title of Your Paper

Learner's Full Name

Capella University

Course Number and Name

Instructor Name

Month Year

## Abstract

**NOTE**: **An Abstract is only required when the instructions of the assignment specifically direct you to create one.** An abstract is a brief, comprehensive summary of the contents of a paper. It allows readers to quickly review the key elements of a paper without having to read the entire document. This can be helpful for readers who are searching for specific information and may be reviewing many documents. The abstract may be one of the most important paragraphs in a paper because readers often decide if they will read the document based on information in the abstract. An abstract may not be required in some academic papers; however, it can still be an effective method of gaining the reader's attention. The following sentences serve as an example of what could be composed as an abstract for this paper: The basic elements of APA style will be reviewed, including formatting of an APA-style paper, in-text citations, and a reference list. Additional information will address the components of an introduction, how to write effective paragraphs using the MEAL plan, and elements of a summary and conclusion section of a paper.

APA Style Paper Template: A Resource for Academic Writing

**(Please change the titles in this document to fit your paper.)**

American Psychological Association (APA) style is most commonly used to cite sources within the social sciences. APA style is used when writing papers in the psychology programs offered at Capella University. This document serves as an APA style template for you to use when writing your own papers, as well as a resource containing valuable information that can be used when writing academic papers. For more information on APA style, refer to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020).

In the first section of this paper, the author demonstrates how an introduction effectively introduces the reader to the topic of the paper. In APA style, an introduction never gets a heading. For example, this section does not begin with a heading titled "Introduction," unlike the following section, which is titled "Writing an Effective Introduction." The following section will explain in greater detail a model that can be used to effectively write an introduction in an academic paper. The remaining sections of the paper will continue to address APA style and effective writing concepts including section headings, organizing information, the MEAL plan, the conclusion, and the reference list.

## Writing an Effective Introduction

An effective introduction often consists of four main components, including (a) the position statement, thesis, or hypothesis, which describes the author's main position; (b) the purpose, which outlines the objective of the paper; (c) the background, which contains general information needed to understand the content of the paper; and (d) the approach, which is the process or methodology the author uses to achieve the purpose of the paper. This information

will help readers understand what will be discussed in the paper. It can also serve as a tool to grab the reader's attention. Authors may choose to briefly reference sources that will be identified later in the paper, as in this example (APA, 2020; APA, 2010; Walker, 2008).

In an introduction, the writer often presents something of interest to capture the reader's attention and introduce the issue. Adding an obvious statement of purpose helps the reader know what to expect while helping the writer to focus and stay on task. For example, this paper will address several components necessary to effectively write an academic paper, including (a) how to write an introduction, (b) how to write effective paragraphs using the MEAL plan, and (c) how to properly use APA style.

## Level 1 Section Heading Is Centered, Bold, Upper, and Lowercase

Using section headings is an effective method of organizing an academic paper. Section headings can significantly improve the quality of a paper. This is accomplished because section headings help both the reader and the author with the organization of ideas and flow of the work.

### Level 2 Section Heading is Flush Left, Bold, Upper, and Lowercase

The heading style recommended by APA consists of five levels (APA, 2020). This document contains two levels to demonstrate how headings are structured according to APA style. Immediately before the previous paragraph, a Level 1 Section Heading was used. That section heading describes how a Level 1 Heading should be written, which is centered and bold, using upper- and lowercase letters. For another example, see the section heading "Writing an Effective Introduction," on page 3 of this document. A Level 2 heading is used when there are subcategories under a Level 1 topic. For example, you may have a Level 1 heading of Theories, and then subcategories (Level 2 sections) of Behavioral Theory, Cognitive Theory, and Psychodynamic Theory. You made not always need Level 2 headings in your work.

### Section Headings Help the Reader

Section headings serve multiple purposes, including (a) helping the reader understand what is being addressed in each section, (b) helping readers, who may be more likely to maintain an interest in the paper, and (c) helping readers choose what they want to read. For example, if the reader of this document wants to learn more about writing an effective introduction, the previous section heading clearly states that is where information can be found. When subtopics are needed to explain concepts in greater detail, different levels of headings are used according to APA style.

### Section Headings Help the Author

Section headings do not only help the reader but also can help the author organize the document during the writing process. Section headings can help arrange topics in a logical order, and they can help an author manage the length of the paper. In addition to an effective introduction and the use of section headings, each paragraph of an academic paper can be written in a manner that helps the reader stay engaged. Capella University promotes the use of the MEAL plan to serve this purpose.

## The MEAL Plan

The MEAL plan is a model used by Capella University to help learners effectively compose academic discussions and papers. Each component of the MEAL plan is critical to writing an effective paragraph. The acronym MEAL is based on four components of a paragraph (M = Main point, E = Evidence or Example, A = Analysis, and L = Link). The following section includes a detailed description and examples of each component of the MEAL plan.

When writing the content sections of an academic paper (as opposed to the introduction or conclusion sections), the MEAL plan can be an effective model for designing each paragraph.

A paragraph begins with a description of the main point, which is represented by the letter "M" of the MEAL plan. For example, the first sentence of this paragraph clearly states that the main point is a discussion of the MEAL plan. Once the main point has been made, evidence and examples are provided.

The second component of a paragraph contains evidence or examples, which are represented by the letter "E" in the MEAL plan. An example of this component is actually this sentence, which provides an example of an example. Evidence can be in the form of expert-opinion and findings from research. For example, evidence shows that plagiarism can occur even when it is not intended if sources are not properly cited (Marsh et al., 1997; Walker, 2008). The previous sentence provides evidence supporting why evidence is used in a paragraph.

Analysis, which is represented by the letter "A" of the MEAL plan, should be based on the author's interpretation of the evidence. An effective analysis might include a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments, as well as the author's interpretations of the evidence and examples. If a quote is used, the author should provide an analysis of the quote and the specific point it makes for the author's position. Without an analysis, the reader might not understand why the author discussed the information that the reader just read. For example, the previous sentence is an analysis by the author of why an analysis is performed when writing paragraphs in academic papers. Even with the first three elements of the MEAL plan, it would not be complete without the final component.

The letter "L" of the MEAL plan refers to information that links the current and the subsequent paragraphs. The link helps the reader understand what will be discussed in the next paragraph. It summarizes the author's reasoning and shows how the paragraph fits together and leads (that is, links) to the next section of the paper. For example, this sentence might explain

that once the MEAL plan has been effectively used when writing the body of an academic paper, the final section is the summary and conclusion section.

## Summary and Conclusion

A summary and conclusion section, which can also be the discussion section of an APA-style paper, is the final opportunity for the author to make a lasting impression on the reader. The author can begin by restating positions and summarizing the most important points that have been presented in the paper. It is not a place to introduce new information that was not presented previously in the paper. For example, this paper was written to demonstrate to readers how to effectively use APA style when writing academic papers. Various components of an APA-style paper that were discussed or displayed in the form of examples include a title page, introduction section, levels of section headings and their use, in-text citations, the MEAL plan, a conclusion, and the references list.

# References

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). Author.

American Psychological Association. (2010). *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct.* http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx

Marsh, R. L., Landau, J. D., & Hicks, J. L. (1997). Contributions of inadequate source monitoring to unconscious plagiarism during idea generation. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition, 23*(4), 886–897. doi:10.1037/0278-7393.23.4.886

Walker, A. L. (2008). Preventing unintentional plagiarism: A method for strengthening paraphrasing skills. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 35*(4), 387–395. http://search.proquest.com/docview/213904438?accountid=27965

Always begin a reference list on a new page. Use a hanging indent after the first line of each reference. The reference list is in alphabetical order by the author's last name. A reference list contains only sources that are cited in the body of the paper, and all sources cited in the body of the paper must be contained in the reference list.

When a digital object identifier (DOI) is available for a journal article, it should be placed at the end of the citation. If a DOI is not available, a uniform resource locator (URL) should be used. The Marsh, Landau, and Hicks (1997) reference is an example of how to cite a source using a DOI. The Walker (2008) reference is an example of how to cite a source using a URL.

**REMINDER: Delete all unneeded placeholder text from your paper. This may include unnecessary headings and explanatory content such as the paragraphs above.**